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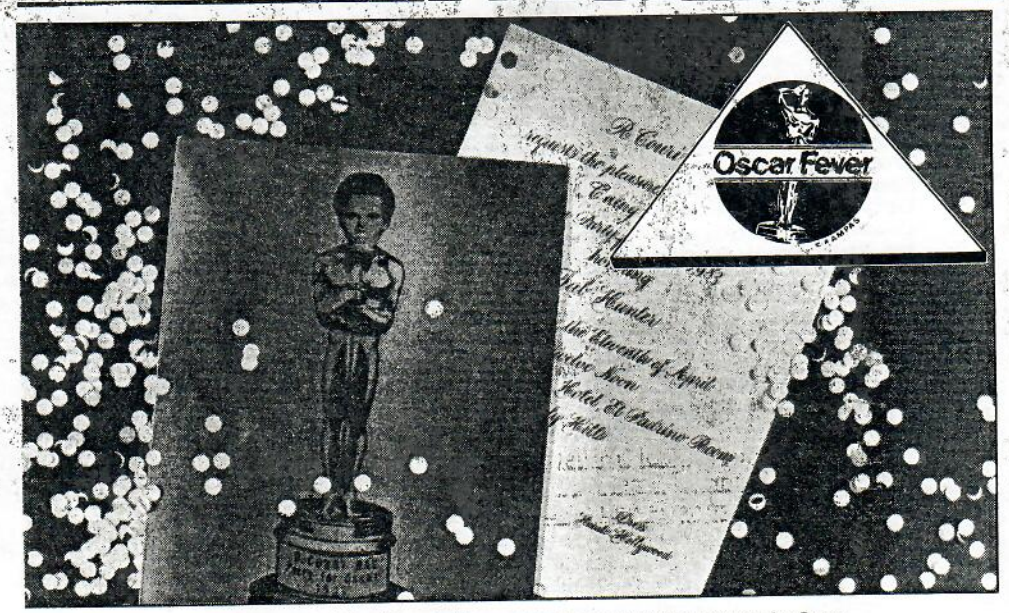

Irving Lazar is not giving his party this year, but there are still some galas for Oscar and the well connected.

Who's chic-est of 'em all? Oscar

By CATHERINE SEIPP
Daily News Staff Writer

If there's no business like show business, there are also no parties like show business parties. And Oscar parties are the most show business parties of all.

There was the time, for instance, that R. Couri Hay, the National Enquirer gossip columnist, was asked to leave the Oscar party given at the ultra-chic Spago restaurant last year.

"They said, 'We're sorry, but a major star has asked you to leave,' recalls Hay. 'I said, 'Who?' They said, 'Valerie Perrine.'

"I said, 'Major? Major?' "

Hay did leave, but not before taking a giant pot of flowers and heaving it through the door behind him. His driver got him away in time, though.

Then there was the brouhaha last year when superagent Irving ("Swifty") Lazar asked Truman Capote not to bring the ex-Mrs. Johnny Carson to Lazar's party because Johnny himself was going to be there and would have been annoyed.

But Lazar is not giving an Oscar party this year, the first in some time that he has not. He has been in New York for the "Porgy and Bess" party he held there last week.

"Probably Liza Minnelli was begging him to come to New York," speculates Hay. "This definitely puts the Governor's Ball up about 100 points."

The Governor's Ball, hosted by the Academy and held each year at the Beverly Hilton, is the official Oscar party. But invited guests often leave early — or skip it entirely — for smaller, more chic goings-on about town.

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Parties fete Oscar — all around chic parts of town

The only daytime Oscar party is the luncheon Hay has held for the past eight years in the Beverly Wilshire's El Padrino room. Usually the National Enquirer foots the bill, but since Hay is now "an independent walking, talking gossip machine" (although the tabloid will still carry his column), he is hosting it this year himself.

Although the party is for Oscar, sometimes there are also honored guests. This year it is Tab Hunter.

"I think that Tab is a fabulous man," says Hay. "He's handsome. He is, to me, haute Hollywood glamour. And he is one of the great leading men. Fred Astaire isn't working anymore. Cary Grant isn't working anymore. You have people like Donald O'Connor and Gene Kelly, but they're really old.

"They never gave Tab an Oscar, and I think he deserves one for stamina. I want everyone to know what surviving is.

"Now, Jessica Lange is a great friend of mine and I hope she's not mad that I'm not giving this party for her," Hay continues. "But she's up for two categories, and I think she's going to be too busy. I was thinking of asking Drew Barrymore, but I don't know her, and she's only 8."

"Last year the guest of honor was Patti D'Arbanville. Two days before she called and said she was in Cedars-Sinai. She was pregnant and they thought it was in the fallopian tube or something. I said, 'Look, the party's for Oscar. The party will go on.' She crawled out of bed and came.

"The year the president was shot we sent the pianist home — he didn't want to play — although I wanted it to be like the Titanic and the band played on. We had bigger attendance than ever."

This year, guests will include Timothy Leary and songwriter Carol Connors, who will sing her lyrics to the theme from "Sophie's Choice." When the theme was nominated for an Oscar, Connors was asked to write words for it. The song is now called "To Face the World Alone."

Hay's luncheon is one of the most exclusive Oscar parties. "I'm afraid there's going to be 100 guests, but I can only seat 85," he says. "I'm hoping there'll be last minute faintings and illnesses."

In fact, says R. Couri Hay, last year's party ended only after he went out to the six-foot ice sculpture of Oscar he had put on the driveway, knocked the head off with a high kick and "declared the party fini."

Even in Hollywood on Oscar night, there has to come a time when the party's over.